

your shelter from the storm by krelboyne

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Summary:

There's a torch in his car somewhere, he knows that much, but he also knows that pointing a torch in Billy Hargrove's face will only encourage him to finish what he'd started back in November.

Steve brakes and Billy keeps walking. He shouts, 'Need a ride?', and feels every shade of pathetic when that earns him no response.

Keep driving, he thinks to himself. *Fuck that guy*, he thinks. *If he wants to walk around in the middle of a storm, let him.*

But Steve's brain and his body must have some sort of disconnect, or. Maybe there's a *lag*, or something, because, before he knows it, his seatbelt's off and the door's open and he's being baptised in rainwater. He's rushing towards Billy on quick feet and reaching out to grab his elbow. 'Hargrove.'

1. Chapter 1

It's raining ice.

Sharp, slim shards of glassy water. Cold just to look at.

It's loud in the shelter of his car, rain thrashing the windows at every angle.

Steve decides it's pointless to flick the stereo on. Any music, played at even the most ridiculous volume, would only be drowned out by the hailstorm anyway.

He's jittery, not a big fan of driving around at night these days, but it's worse tonight. Worse with the storm firing sleet at his windows, and he *knows* that there's *some* degree of safety here. Knows just how unlikely it is that the hail will actually *pierce* the glass like bullets, but, still. There's *knowing* the reality of something, and then there's *believing* it.

It isn't *late*, but it's January and it's dark, and it's still late enough. It's after nine, and he'd much prefer to be tucked away inside the shelter of his house. Wrapped in blankets, TV blaring, and every light switched *on*, thank you.

It's Dustin's fault. Not the rain, obviously - though Steve's inclined to believe that if anybody could control the weather, it would be Dustin - but the fact that he's out here at all. King Steve is now *Chauffeur Steve*, apparently. He doesn't mind it and he *does* mind it. Hates this part of it all; hates the driving around in the dark, in the awful weather. Still, it gives him peace of mind. This part is much more tolerable, knowing that Dustin is at *home* and *safe*, and not riding his bike on slippery roads, in the goddamn *dark*, because it doesn't seem to matter to these kids. Doesn't seem to matter how much shit they *see*, how much shit they *know* about this town. They're insufferable like that. Little shits. Steve's blood pressure is through the roof because of them.

What's sadder, though, is that it doesn't *just* give Steve peace of mind. It gives him something to *do*.

He likes the company of the kids. Likes feeling important and responsible. Likes feeling a little less alone, so. It's worth it, sometimes, driving around at night, fingers tight and tense around the steering wheel, foot always ready to apply maximum pressure to the gas pedal - just in case.

It's sad, but. At least he knows that. Steve isn't pretending that there's anything remotely *cool* left about him. That's something, right? Does acceptance result in maintaining a slither of dignity, or does it make him even more pathetic? He doesn't know. Doesn't know a lot of things anymore, but.

He *does* know that there's nothing normal, or right, or *okay*, about Billy Hargrove wandering down the sidewalk. In the dark and in the winter storm. And *alone*.

Steve drives past him, first. Sails right past with some tiny amount of intrigue, like, *who's that?*, and, *who the hell would be out in this?*

It takes him a second before he realises he knows the answer to his first question, and then Steve's reversing until his window is running parallel to the figure who's strolling in the rain.

And, sure, it's dark out, visibility made worse by the heavy rainfall, but he *knows* it's Billy, just like Steve knows that the shit in Hawkins isn't really over. Isn't ever really over. It's something instinctual, like sniffing out danger. It makes sense, then, that he can spot Hargrove in the rainy dark, just as clearly as seeing him when the sun's up. If Hargrove isn't the epitome of *human* danger, then he doesn't know who *is*.

Steve's a sap. He should drive right by him, or, better yet, he should honk the horn, call out something dumb like, *nice night for a walk, Hargrove*. Splash the fucker with puddle water.

He's a sap. Or, maybe he's just trying not to be so goddamn petty anymore. Maybe he realises that even Billy fucking Hargrove doesn't deserve to be wandering the empty streets of Hawkins long after

nightfall, a potential snack to any monsters still lurking around among the trees that line the roads. Even if Hargrove had deemed Steve disposable enough to give him the beating of a lifetime.

It's not about point scoring. Not anymore. Things are bigger than that. Bigger and realer and *scarier*.

When Steve winds the window down, it's only a couple of inches. Just enough to be able to call out into the dark, and yet enough, still, to drown the interior of his car fucking anyway.

'Hargrove?'

Billy doesn't look at him, but he doesn't have to show Steve his face to confirm himself. There's a voice, sharper than the falling ice and just as cold. 'Fuck off.'

Steve's *definitely* a sap if he doesn't drive on now. He knows better than to trust the town is empty of anything supernatural, but he's almost willing to give Hawkins the benefit of the doubt, regardless. Leave Billy to defend himself, should anything rear its ugly head. It's *too soon*, Steve thinks, for another reappearance of the monstrous kind. It doesn't work like that. There has to be *just enough* time for everybody to start to relax, to start to *believe* that things might actually be over, before the world comes crashing down around them. *Again*.

So, maybe Steve can leave Billy to it. After all, it's only been two months since Hargrove beat the pretty out of his face, and he isn't feeling all too forgiving. Steve's willing to take his chances. Seems unlikely, really, that anything will start up again tonight, anyway.

Still, he finds himself asking, 'What the hell are you doing out here?' Or rather, *shouting*, just so he can be heard over the rain. Finds himself adding, 'You're drenched, man.' As though that isn't obvious enough.

Billy picks up on that, of course, and throws back, 'Really, Einstein? Didn't notice.'

Steve pictures throttling Billy, and it helps soothe the flash of

resentment that kick-starts in his gut. The interior of his car is the last thing on his mind now. He drags the window down the rest of the way, rain licking at his face. 'Hey, *Einstein*, you look a lot like a dumbass yourself right now.' It's not the best comeback, by any means, but - who's Hargrove to insult *his* intelligence, when he's the one out in a rainstorm with just a measly *denim fucking jacket* on his back?

The fucker just flips him off, so Steve asks, 'Where are you *going*, Hargrove?'

And Billy keeps walking, head up, despite the water that lashes at him. Keeps walking straight ahead.

It's almost unnerving, the way Steve can hardly make out Billy's expression. His headlights are pointed down the road and Billy's *beside* him. There's a torch in his car somewhere, he knows that much, but he also knows that pointing a torch in Billy Hargrove's face will only encourage him to finish what he'd started back in November.

Steve brakes and Billy keeps walking. He shouts, 'Need a ride?', and feels every shade of pathetic when that earns him no response.

Keep driving, he thinks to himself. *Fuck that guy*, he thinks. *If he wants to walk around in the middle of a storm, let him.*

But Steve's brain and his body must have some sort of disconnect, or. Maybe there's a *lag*, or something, because, before he knows it, his seatbelt's off and the door's open and he's being baptised in rainwater. He's rushing towards Billy on quick feet and reaching out to grab his elbow. 'Hargrove.'

'What the fuck, Harrington?' Billy asks, and it's equal parts frustrated and *confused*, and that's fair enough.

'Get in the car.' Steve tells him. Doesn't ask. *Tells.*

'That an order?'

'No time, man. We're drowning out here.'

Steve's soaked through, and he's only been out in the open for a handful of seconds. Billy's a state, but it's still so *dark*, even closer up. He still can't quite place Billy's features and, besides, his face is half-hidden by his hair, wet and windswept and in his eyes.

There's some awkward lull. Billy's arm is still captured by Steve's hand and neither of them are talking. He won't *push*. Thinks that this is more than enough - stepping out of the car, and grabbing Hargrove. He won't *tug*, even if he sort of wants to, just to get out of the goddamn rain, but he isn't going to wait much longer, either.

He lets go of Billy's arm, and that's when Hargrove finally speaks up. 'Fine.'

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It's warm and, not exactly *dry* in the car anymore, but - drier.

The rain still batters the windows and there's a constant *plink-plink-plink* coming from somewhere inside the car. Probably the droplets that are dripping from Billy's soaked hair.

It's still dark, but the car offers shelter from the rain, and Steve's pushing damp hair out of his eyes just to take a better look at Billy.

He's bleeding.

It's still dark, but Steve can *see* that Billy's bleeding. From his mouth. Lower lip looking split and red.

Everything starts to make a fraction more sense. The only reason Billy's out here is because he's been *fighting*. Still, that doesn't explain where his car is; doesn't explain why Billy had been walking in the opposite direction to home.

'Having a good night?' Steve asks dryly.

Billy scoffs. Doesn't feel like talking, apparently, and Steve isn't too fussed either. He's *begrudgingly* offering Hargrove a ride. He certainly doesn't need to hear the full story, and certainly doesn't want to hear the guy's bragging.

But. That's the thing. Billy isn't bragging. There's no, *well, you should see the other guy*. Nothing like that. Just silence and that constant *plink-plink-plink*.

So, Steve shoots another question Billy's way. Something more direct and genuine. Something that requires an answer. 'Home, then?' Because, although the road is empty, he can't stay parked in the middle of it all night. Can't, and won't. Steve wants to go home, and wants to get rid of the waterlogged burden in his passenger seat.

'Nah.'

Oh, he speaks, Steve thinks. Says, 'No?'

'Not home. Just,' Billy waves a hand, 'drive.'

'Drive where?'

'Wherever.' Hargrove snaps.

What kind of answer is *that*? Steve's just about ready to push Billy out of the door when he sees that he's shivering. It's automatic, really, when he reaches out to nudge up the heat. Automatic, too, when he scolds Billy with, 'You should really invest in a winter coat, man.'

'You should really invest in shutting your mouth.'

Steve's got to hand it to Billy: he might have a point there. He won't admit that, though, so Steve just scoffs. 'Seriously, Hargrove, where am I taking you?'

Billy shrugs, non-committal. 'Where are you going?'

'Home. Eventually.' Steve mirrors his shrug. 'Hopefully.'

'Okay.' There's a sigh from the passenger seat. 'Let's go then.'

'What?' Steve's hands are damp around the steering wheel. Damp and cold and growing rigid where his fingers grip too tightly.

'Let's go?'

'To my place?'

'Yeah, Brainiac. That's what I said.'

'Hm. Yeah. *Why*, exactly?'

Billy sighs, louder and more impatient this time. 'So I can dry off, maybe?'

Steve's about to prompt Billy with another, *yeah, but why?*, when the rain starts to lash a little heavier, a little more ruthlessly, against the windows, and the thought of frozen water shattering glass seems feasible. He yanks the seatbelt across his body and drives on.

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'Throwing a party or something?'

'Huh?'

The car's creeping up the driveway, and Steve's soon slowing to a stop. Is soon killing the engine with a turn of his key. The drive's been quiet; Billy gracing Steve with a stony silence - until now.

'A party.' Billy repeats. 'Your house.' He points, as though Steve could possibly misplace it. 'It's lit up like a Christmas tree.'

'Oh.' Steve laughs; it isn't warm or amused, but as cold and stony as the silence they've just been stewing in. 'No party.'

'Your folks in?' Billy's staring out of the window, double-checking the driveway, as though there's some chance his eyes might have neglected to notice another vehicle.

'Nope. Just me.'

And Billy Hargrove.

It's surreal, unlocking the front door with Billy lingering by his side. Lingering and *waiting* to be let in. Reminds Steve of a *dog*, but. He absolutely does not mention it. Billy follows at his feet. Like a dog. Steve closes the door behind them, turns the key and locks out the

storm.

The house is warm, and dry, and *bright*. So bright, in fact, that Steve has to squint against the light while his eyes adjust. Billy's already wandering down the hall like he knows his way around, or. Like he's actually been *invited* here. Wandering around in wet boots.

'Hargrove?'

Billy turns on the spot. He looks lost, out of place, like a rain-drenched puppy that Steve's rescued from the lonely dark.

'Do you mind?' Steve's already shuffling out of his own sneakers; thinks it's hint enough that he needn't elaborate.

'Oh.' Billy retreats and slips right out of his boots without untying the laces.

It's a strange image: Steve's rain-slick sneakers left by the door, sat by Billy's scuffed boots. Strange to not only *have* some form of company, but to be reminded of it. Seeing their shoes side-by-side is sort of like being pinched on the arm. Proof that Steve isn't dreaming.

There's an overwhelming sense of, *what the fuck happens now?*, and Steve glances at Billy as though he'll find the answer written on his face, and, in a way, he *does*.

Billy's lip is still glittering with blood. It looks worse here, under the artificial lights where Steve can take a better look. He asks, 'Do you know you're bleeding?'

Billy brings two fingers to his swollen lip, dabs and examines the results. 'Figured I was,' he says, 'Thought it might've stopped by now.'

'You should clean that up.' Steve isn't entirely happy about playing doctor, but, it gives him something to do next, at least. He says, 'Come with me', and doesn't turn around; simply expects Billy to follow. He doesn't stop walking until they reach the bathroom, and Steve's pushing the door open. 'There's a first-aid kit in the cabinet, if you wanna use it.'

Billy's already at the sink. He says, 'Nah. Do you have ice?'

'Sure.' Steve lingers for a second, watching as Billy carefully rinses the cut with clean water. That same surreal feeling that Steve experienced at seeing their shoes sat together resurfaces now. Billy Hargrove, split-lipped, stretching across his sink to peer into the mirror as he tends to the wound. It's *bizarre*. Hargrove - *Hargrove*, in his own goddamn home, cleaning blood from his face and staring into the same mirror that Steve had when he'd been doing the same back in November; peeling off the cartoonish band-aids the kids had dressed his Billy-made wounds with.

He has to physically wrench himself away.

In the kitchen, he gathers ice and wraps it in a towel. Wonders, not for the first time, why he's even *helping* the guy. He supposes he has no other option, not now Billy's actually here.

Steve heads back to the bathroom and finds Billy inspecting his own reflection in the mirror. 'Hey,' he says. He ignores the fact that Billy flinches. 'Ice.'

Billy takes the towel. 'Thanks.'

He's already applying cold pressure to the cut on his lip when Steve asks, 'Wanna sit down?' Billy looks around, as though he's scoping out the best place to sit. Very nearly props himself down on the edge of the bathtub before Steve quickly interjects. 'I mean, the living room? Wanna come sit down?'

Billy shrugs, like it doesn't matter either way, but he follows Steve out of the bathroom and back down the hall, towel held against his mouth the whole time.

They're still wet. Steve's clothes are damp, hair damper, but. Billy's worse off. It's not very sensible, probably, for Steve to gesture towards the couch while Billy's still soaked, but he isn't sure what else to do. Besides, it's just *water*, it'll dry. His mom isn't around to complain, so who cares? He does consider grabbing a couple of towels - even considers asking Billy if he wants to borrow a dry shirt - before he swiftly reconsiders. He doesn't want to do Hargrove any

favours, and is under the impression that Billy wouldn't even accept any of his offers - would probably shut him down, instead, with some witty insult. Something to make Steve feel stupid for even asking.

Steve doesn't bother with any niceties. He takes the armchair nearest the couch and asks, 'Another fight, Hargrove?'

'Something like that.' Billy responds, words mildly muffled behind the towel.

'Where's your car?'

'At home.'

'Oh. You weren't out in it tonight?'

'Christ, Harrington.' Billy brings the towel away from his lip, just so he can say, 'What is this? Twenty Questions?'

Steve frowns. 'Just asking.'

There's an uncomfortable stretch of silence, and Steve's honestly thinking about walking away. Going to the kitchen to grab some food, or. Just going in any other room, until Billy decides he's warm enough and dry enough to step back into the wet dark beyond Steve's house, but -

Billy's breaking the quiet. Is abruptly clearing his throat and asking, 'Can I stay?'

'Huh?' Steve's eyes feel wide in his skull. He must look a picture, but Billy isn't even looking at him. His eyes are on the TV instead, even though it's *off*. Staring at it intently, like he might be able to switch it on with enough concentration. Like that chick from that horror movie, or. Like *El*.

'Do you mind?' For the first time, Billy's voice is *small*. He is, quite clearly, regretting his question already.

'What? You wanna *stay* here? Like, stay the night?'

Billy laughs, but he doesn't sound amused. It's sharp, a little bitter.

'It's *fine*. I'll take that as a no.' He's already moving. The icepack hits the coffee table, and Billy's getting to his feet.

Steve isn't thinking straight. 'Wait,' he blurts out, hand out like a stop sign. 'Wait. It's. I was just asking.' He shakes his head. 'I didn't think you were being serious.'

'I'm deadly serious.' Billy says, on his feet and standing in the centre of Steve's living room; mouth bloody, clothes wrinkled, and sticking out like a sore thumb.

Steve believes him, but can't quite help the scepticism in his words. 'Okay...' His mouth is dry. God, he's thirsty. Needs water, needs something *stronger*. 'You can stay.'

Billy visibly relaxes. Only a little. His shoulders sag, but his fists are still curled up like he might thank Steve with a punch to his face.

'But,' Steve goes on, 'Why? I mean. Why don't you want me to drive you home?'

He thinks he might miss the dark, actually. Might miss how it cloaked Billy's expressions. Because Billy's grimacing, now, and - it's not a *good* look. Steve doesn't feel entirely *safe* around that look. He's close to saying, *forget about it, take the couch*, but Billy's speaking. Speaking *quietly*, like he hopes Steve won't hear.

'My dad did it.' Billy waves a hand across his face, and it all suddenly makes a little more sense - Billy being *here*, Billy wanting to *stay*.

'Your dad hit you?' Steve doesn't finish with, *hard enough to bust your lip*, but he wants to. Doesn't, out of politeness, mostly.

'That's what I said.'

'Why?' The question's out there before Steve can help himself.

Billy scoffs. 'Does it matter?'

'No. No, I guess not.' It doesn't - it's none of Steve's business - and yet, it also kind of *does* matter.

Steve knows how Billy can be. Knows he's trouble, but. *His* dad would never -

'Don't worry your pretty head about it, Harrington.'

Steve stares at Billy. Gapes, even. He has so many questions, and it's true that he's never quite sure when to shut his mouth, but he refrains from asking, this time. Presses his mouth into a hard line, instead, and narrows his eyes. 'Alright. Stay. If you want.'

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The guest room is nicer, but the bed is stripped.

Steve offers, 'I can grab some sheets and set it up for you?'

Billy shakes his head. 'The couch is fine.'

The couch *is* comfortable. Long and wide and plush, and Steve knows, from experience, that it's not half-bad to sleep on. There's some relief, too, in Billy dismissing Steve's suggestion to set up the guest room. He's exhausted, for one, but. It'd be quite something, he thinks, to try to fall asleep in his bed, knowing that Billy's only on the other side of the wall. Bad enough, knowing that he's downstairs. It's like some fucked-up sleepover, and Steve's already looking forward to sunrise.

He wants this to be over, and wants this to be as easy as possible, but he still finds himself saying, 'You should dry off properly, then.' Still finds himself saying, 'I'll grab a towel. Maybe some dry clothes?'

Billy shrugs and Steve leaves the room with a sigh.

He can't think about it all too much, otherwise he'll stay distracted - won't get anything done. He floats around the house, instead, thinking solely about what he's presently doing, and what he needs to do next. Upstairs, he grabs a towel from his own bathroom. It's folded and clean and dry; fluffy and warm. It looks *good*, because Steve's hair has been dripping down the back of his neck, and he feels cold *inside*. It'll have to wait, he decides. He'll do that later. For now, he rifles through his drawers and digs out an old sweater. It's loose and baggy and a little worn, but. He knows it'll fit Billy easily - would

probably very nearly fit them *both* in it - and, besides, it's warm and it's clean; comfortable.

Steve yanks out a pair of sweatpants, too. It's - probably a bad idea. Can't imagine Billy wanting to borrow a pair of his pants, but. It's polite, right? Would only be stranger to offer Billy just a dry *shirt*, right?

He's almost sure he'll be scolded for his good deed, so Steve doesn't make a show of it when he gets back to the living room. Just leaves the clothes on the arm of the couch, folded up neatly. Says, 'There you go,' and then hands Billy the fresh towel.

Billy mutters something. It might be *thanks*, but it isn't clear enough to know for sure.

Unsure of what to do with himself, Steve just. Runs a hand through his damp hair and asks, 'Alright. Bed?'

Billy nods. 'Alright.'

'Well,' Steve starts, looking around the room, 'Have the lights however you need them. The kitchen's just down the hall, so. If you need a drink or something, help yourself.' Because that's too far, he thinks. He won't pander to any more of Billy's needs. The guy can go grab his own glass of water, if he pleases.

Hargrove is quiet, but he's watching Steve. Just. Watching him. Maybe he's waiting for more words, or. Maybe he has nothing to say. Either way, it's mildly unnerving and only serves to make Steve feel more uncomfortable, so he starts out of the living room with a reluctant, 'Right then. Goodnight?'

-

Steve wakes with a start.

It feels like coming out of a nightmare and re-entering the real world. Except. His room is *dark*. It *can't* be the real world, because when Steve wakes from nightmares, he's greeted by the warm, comforting glow of his bedside lamp. Is greeted, immediately, by the mundane safety of his own bedroom; greeted with inanimate objects that can't

harm him.

Steve's eyes *are* open, he knows it, but it's still dark.

He shifts and feels something solid pressed up behind him and the bat - *the goddamn bat* - is left, discarded, on the other side of the room.

'It's just me.'

Steve relaxes, initially, at the sound of a voice that's thoroughly *human*.

And then he flinches, because that voice is *unmistakable, recognisable*. Belongs to a human that doesn't belong here, in Steve's house, and, certainly not in Steve's *bed*.

'Billy?'

'Yeah,' he answers smoothly, like there's no problem. Like they do this all the time.

'What're you *doing*? Why are the lights off?'

'Couch wasn't comfortable.' Billy's voice is gruff, and the words are spoken into Steve's ear. 'Do you always sleep with the lights on?'

'What? No,' he lies, wondering how the conversation is turning on *him*, and drifting away from the fact that Billy Hargrove is tucked up behind him.

'Turned the lamp off. Too bright.'

'Why are you in my bed?' Steve wants to ask, *why are you lying behind me? Why are you so goddamn close?*

'Like I said,' Billy sounds sleepy, 'Wasn't comfortable.'

'So you decided *this* is a better idea?'

Billy shrugs. Steve isn't facing him, but he can feel the rise and fall of his shoulders. Billy's *that* close.

Steve's heart is in his throat, for some reason. It doesn't seem like he's in his own bedroom anymore, but is somewhere *else*. Somewhere unfamiliar; dangerous. He doesn't know what his next move is, but he still shifts, makes to sit up - makes to roll out of the bed. To get away from Billy, but.

'Don't.' Billy's mouth brushes against Steve's ear, sending a chill up his spine, and back down again. There's a hand on Steve's hip, heavy and vice-like, keeping him in place.

'What?' He can hardly recognise his own voice. He sounds far away, *feels* far away. Feels like he's floating. Light-headed and dizzy, and suddenly very, very warm. Steve doesn't know what's happening, and yet, at the same time, he figures he *does*. There's something in the air. Something white-hot and heady, and brought on by the fact that Billy's palm is keeping him pressed into the mattress.

'It's no big deal,' Billy decides. Tells Steve like it's a fact. Like he doesn't have a say in the matter. 'Never shared a bed before?'

'Obviously.' Steve spits. He's whispering, as though they're not alone, hushed and frantic when he says, 'Still doesn't explain why you're here.' Steve is stock-still now; couldn't move if he wanted to. And he *does*, he tells himself. He does want to. 'If you were so uncomfortable, you should've *told* me. Or,' he adds, tongue sharp, 'better yet, you should just suck it up for one fucking night.'

Billy laughs, quiet and breathy. Right into Steve's ear.

He can't help it. Can't help the way his body twitches, or. *Shudders*.

That only makes Billy laugh again. Low and throaty, and so *warm* against Steve's neck. His breath ghosts across skin and tickles his hair. Billy mumbles, 'Besides, the couch isn't the only reason I couldn't sleep.'

Steve says nothing. Just waits, because there's more to come. Obviously. Waits it out, even when the seconds drag in a silence that feels so *full*, so tense.

'Forgot to thank you, I guess.' Billy says, or *admits*. He doesn't sound

sheepish, though. Doesn't sound shy about it. There's something confident in his words, for the first time tonight.

'That's why you're in my bed?' It's all Steve can keep saying, because it's easier than mentioning the fact that Billy's practically cuddling up to him. Easier than pointing out the fact that Steve can feel the solid warmth of Billy's body against his back.

'Sure,' Billy drawls. Adds, 'It's the least I could do.'

And. Steve must be fucking dreaming. Maybe Billy isn't in his bed, after all. Maybe he's asleep at the *wheel*, still in his car, and Billy Hargrove isn't wandering the streets at night. Maybe Billy Hargrove's tucked into his own bed, lip unsplit, and Steve's just *dreaming*. It's the only logical explanation behind the pressure he feels at the waistband of his boxers; the only rational reason that he should be feeling Billy's fingers crawling beneath the material, cold and assertive.

'Billy.' It's all Steve can do; all he can say. He's frozen, half-convinced that he's dreaming. That he crashed his car during the storm and this is some coma-induced hallucination.

'Steve.' Billy shoots back, voice like velvet. 'Relax.'

He can't relax, because this is wrong. So wrong. Like, on so many *levels*. Yet, despite that knowledge, his body is reacting to Billy's roaming hand. Steve's pulse is racing, like he's running from monsters and not just curled up in bed. He's hot under the duvet, and Billy's hand is frosty, raises goosebumps on his skin, and Steve's cock is stirring, waking up. Has a mind of its own and knows that a hand is nearby. Knows, and *wants* the contact. Kicks, like it's reaching out for Billy's hand, and. Billy takes it. Wraps his fist around him and Steve's still soft, mostly, even though there's a familiar thrum of blood rushing *down*. Rushing *down* and filling him out. Slow and steady.

'Just wanna thank you,' Billy murmurs, as though Steve's fussing for nothing.

'I think 'thanks' would do,' Steve throws back, unsteady. Says it, even as his hips buck in response to the friction Billy's rough palm

provides.

'Maybe,' Billy's hand is slow-moving, stroking up, down, up, down, as Steve grows stiff. 'But isn't this better?'

It is, Steve thinks, despite himself. He can't deny it; not when the blood is rushing from his brain and into his cock, instead. He doesn't admit it. He just asks, 'This how you thank everybody?'

'Nah,' Billy responds, not taking Steve on. 'Just the ones who deserve it.'

Steve nearly chokes, half-amused, half-surprised. One hundred percent confused. 'I deserve it?'

Billy nods, a faint graze of stubble against Steve's ear. 'You didn't have to help me.'

'No shit.' Steve's breathless - distracted. Is fully hard, now, in Billy's hand. Billy's hand, that's still moving so *slowly*. Painfully slow.

Hargrove laughs again. 'Yeah, well.' He shrugs, never stops stroking Steve. 'I was a prick to you, and you're still helping me.'

Steve wants to ask, *is this some form of apology too, then?*, but doesn't. Opens his mouth to say it, maybe, but groans instead. He can feel the quirk of Billy's mouth against his ear. He's *smiling*. Steve has questions and comments, has a lot to say, in fact, but the words are hard to come by.

It's hard to do anything but surrender to the fist that's curled around him. Even if it's *dry* - not quite slick enough to move against him with grace.

Like Billy can hear his thoughts, he releases his grip and brings his hand out of Steve's underwear, and. There's a sense of *disappointment*. Steve's thinking, *is that it?*, even though he knows it's wrong. Knows they shouldn't be doing this; knows he shouldn't be enjoying it, but. Billy just shifts, and the fucker actually *licks* his hand. Licks his palm, despite having had it wrapped around Steve's cock. It should be gross. It *is* gross, but then the damp palm is folding itself around Steve, and it feels fucking *good*.

'Shit,' he breathes, and nods his head. Can't help it.

'Yeah?' Billy prompts. 'That better?'

Steve wants to stay silent. Doesn't want Billy to remove his hand, but. Still doesn't want to *interact* with the guy. Billy gives him a squeeze, and coaxes a second nod out of him. Coaxes the words right out of Steve. 'Fuck. Yeah.' He licks his dry lips, adds, 'Better.'

'Thought so.' Billy's smiling again, sounds like he's proud of himself.

It's been a while since Steve's had a hand around him. Been a while since he's had *any* kind of thing. He decides *that's* why he's enjoying it so much; that's why he's allowing this to happen. That's why he's rock-hard in Billy Hargrove's palm. Why his hips are restless, thrusting up and chasing the tight, hot pressure that Billy's providing.

'Thanks, Harrington,' Billy mumbles into his ear, as though the words are filthy. They might be. Steve's never had a thank-you quite like this.

And, despite Billy sounding *into* it, Steve still says, 'You don't have to.'

'Huh?' Billy's hand slows, but doesn't stop.

'Do this, I mean. Just to stay here. Just to sleep,' Steve's breath hitches, 'in my bed.'

Billy snickers, and Steve doesn't know what to do with that. Feels conflicted.

'Seriously,' Steve says, tone firm.

Hargrove, the asshole, just leans closer and whispers, 'Shut up. Don't ruin it.' Fucking *smiles* as he ups the pace of his strokes; snaps his wrist up and down, faster now.

Steve doesn't quite understand, but. Also isn't in the frame of mind to *try* to understand. Any and all thoughts seem to just melt. Turn all gloopy. Seem to wash away with the rain that's still hitting his

bedroom window, like the storm's somehow found a way to wriggle itself into his brain.

'You're so stiff, man.' Billy whispers, that same smile lacing his words.

Steve doesn't have the strength to tell him to fuck off. He groans, instead. Writhes around, because Billy's slowing the pace and then speeding it up again. Never quite settling with a pace, but switching between speeds. Switching pressures, too. Squeezing, firm and unforgiving one second, and then holding him feather-light the next.

'You like this, Steve.' Billy's tongue darts out, swipes along the shell of Steve's ear. 'Don't you?'

Steve shivers. *Of course* he fucking likes it. It's obvious enough. His dick is throbbing, sensitive, in Billy's hand. Of course he likes it. Loves it, in fact. *Loves it*. The thought scares him, somehow, and he's an idiot, because he winds up biting out, 'Love it, Billy.'

'Oh,' Billy laughs. 'That so? You love it so much you're gonna come for me?'

Steve wants to growl. Wants to wrench himself away. Wants to tell Billy that he's not coming for *him*, but just because. Just because the firm pressure of his hand feels good. It could be anybody's hand. Doesn't have to be *Billy's*. But, Steve mumbles, 'Jesus. *Yes*. I'm close.'

'I know. I can tell, sweetheart.'

Steve *does* growl. Mutters, 'Don't call me that,' as though his words hold any weight when he's moaning the next second, reaching out to wrap a hand around Billy's forearm. Can feel the muscles in it move and flex as his wrist continues to jerk away.

Billy shushes him, the dick. Tells Steve, 'Just relax.' Tells him, 'Want you to come for me, sweetheart.'

Calls him *that* again, despite Steve's initial protest, but Steve doesn't have much more fight left in him. Because Billy's right: he *is* close.

There's an abrupt, sweet sting, and Steve's suddenly aware of Billy,

closer and sucking on his earlobe, the edge of his teeth kissing the sensitive skin, and then Steve's *coming*. Seeing stars, as though the storm is over and has left a clear sky behind. He's seeing stars as he spills into Hargrove's fist. Seeing stars, as he grows weak in Billy's grip, mouth parted around a noise that would embarrass him, if he had any damn sense left to be embarrassed.

It takes it out of him. Steve comes so hard that he has zero fight, zero awareness, left in him. Steve is exhausted, very suddenly. Weak and shaky, and Billy's whispering in his ear, 'That's good. Good. So good. Relax, now. Close your eyes, sweetheart.'

He does. He closes his eyes.

-

When he opens his eyes again, just a second later, the bedroom is filled with weak sunlight.

A second has passed, or. Maybe several. Maybe several *hours*, because it's not raining, and the sun, soft and just rising, is peering into his window.

Everything catches up to Steve, like remembering a bad dream, or a good dream, or a *wet* dream, and he flinches. Turns to look over his shoulder, but.

Billy's gone.

Billy isn't in his bed, but his bed smells like Billy. Smells, faintly, like cigarettes, and like cologne that doesn't belong in Steve's bedroom. Smells like heat and musk and boy.

Steve's left alone. Left with the mess in his boxers that doesn't quite confirm whether it was all just a dream or whether it all really happened.

When he rolls out of bed, he doesn't change. Figures it can wait a few minutes. Can wait, while he wakes Billy up, because - probably - he decided to stick to the couch, after all. Made Steve come and then slipped downstairs again.

Except, the couch is empty. The whole house is empty.

Billy's boots are gone. Billy's just. *Gone*. Vanished. And, this is a good thing, really, because it means Steve can just pretend it was all some fucked-up dream.

It wasn't, though. Wasn't some dream, and he knows it.

The front door's unlocked. Closed, but. Unlocked, and.

On the couch, Steve's shirt and sweats are left behind. They're not folded, how Steve had left them when he'd presented them to Billy. They're creased, *worn*.

Almost warm, too, as though they've only recently been discarded.

Fuck, Steve thinks. *Fuck*.

-

It's raining fire.

The bathroom's misty and the shower's on high.

Steve's burning up; should probably take a goddamn *cold* shower, but.

This feels good. Feels like it's heating the chill in his bones.

A shower will do the trick, probably. Will wash away the slick between his thighs, at the very least.

He should probably take a cold shower. To wake him up.

Because it still feels like he's dreaming, and.

He can still smell Billy, still *feel* him, even where the water hits.

2. Chapter 2

Notes for the Chapter:

whew, finally have a part 2 for this.

also, big thanks to dulcepericulum for the tons of encouragement and the inspiration to get this DONE
<3

There's no storm, but Steve hears thunder. He tilts his face up to the sky; weak and dark with early evening, but cloudless.

All clear.

Six days since the last rush of rain, when Steve had found Billy Hargrove ambling down the side walk with a bloody mouth. Six days since Billy, in his house. Billy, in his bed. Billy walking his fingers beneath the waistband of Steve's boxer shorts.

Six days.

Not that he's counting.

Still, Steve hears thunder. Hears it growing closer, like it's chasing him - except he isn't running. The sound is louder and coming from behind. Steve dips his gaze from the sky to the stretch of road beyond his parked car, and there's the infamous Camaro, zooming towards him.

For a second, Steve's convinced the car isn't going to *slow*, least of all stop, but. Billy must throw his foot down - hard - on the brake, and the car squeals to an abrupt halt behind Steve's.

He ignores the rapid *thrum-thrum-thrum* of the pulse in his throat; ignores that dizzy feeling as though his brain's just hopped off a roller coaster. He hasn't been *waiting* for this moment, exactly. But. He's been waiting for *something* after Billy's hasty departure. Steve, somehow, hasn't even seen him since. Hasn't caught a fucking

glimpse of the guy. It should be a blessing, of course, but Steve's stomach has been lurching since the morning he'd discovered his borrowed clothes left on the couch, still warm, and Billy nowhere to be found.

It feels - unfinished. Steve has never been good at letting things slide, at leaving things be. Especially things like this. Dangerous things. Things that he should leave well alone. He has a knack for finding danger and running straight towards it. Dorky kids who can't stay away from monsters, fist-fights he can't win. Billy fucking Hargrove.

Steve's staring at the motionless car, feet firmly planted. He isn't going to run. Christ, if anybody should feel the need to *avoid* this confrontation, it's *Billy*. Billy who started this whole thing. Billy, who crept into his room and jerked him off as some sort of thank you, all rolled up in a too-late apology.

Steve's not running.

A door's thrown open and Max flies out, swinging it shut behind her. 'Steve?'

'Max. Hey.' He's distracted, too busy staring at Billy through the wind-shield. 'The boys are inside.'

She rushes into the arcade without a goodbye and Steve thinks, *you're just like your brother*, but it doesn't matter. He's too distracted for small-talk, especially now that Billy's looking back at him. His face is - blank. It's hard to tell, really, from where Steve's standing. He scratches the back of his neck, toes at some loose gravel that sits by his feet, then finally decides to stride towards the Camaro, mind completely void of any sort of plan. *Bad idea, bad idea*. It's like a stuck record skipping in his brain, over and over. It's a warning and one he should, but does not, heed.

A sudden *roar* drowns out the repetitive track in Steve's head. Billy's revving the Camaro's engine. Once, twice, and on the third, the car shoots forward and hurtles past Steve. It's instinctive when he takes a step back, dodging the impact of metal that would never have come anyway. It's instinctive, too, when he scrambles to his own car, shoes kicking up dust, and slides in behind the wheel.

The track is back. *Bad idea, bad idea, bad idea* -

From his window, Steve stares into the neon mouth of the arcade. It is a bad idea, but Steve's responsibilities for the night are over. The kids are inside. Mrs Henderson's playing cabdriver tonight. A sleepover, or something, at Dustin's. Billy's responsibilities must be over too, because Max is joining the others, and. Shit. Steve fires the engine up, flicks the headlights on and rolls into motion. Moves *fast* and eats up the stretch of road in front of him, until he's seeing tail-lights ahead.

He's chasing an impossible target. When he thinks he's making progress, the car in front leaps further forward, leaving Steve right where he started.

He's too slow, and a car gets between them, but Steve keeps the Camaro in sight. It's fast and sleek and, in the dark, looks almost shark-like and predatory, but it's *Steve* who's doing the following, and he wonders if Billy even knows.

He must. He *must*, because he's driving like he's trying to get away. Even more so when the vehicle between them finally takes a left turn and veers away, and Steve's suddenly behind Billy; suddenly catching up.

It's a fucking car chase, essentially, and it's stupid and it's unreasonable, and it's completely inevitable.

Steve's had enough girls to know which ones to call back and which to leave hanging, but. Billy Hargrove isn't a girl. Billy Hargrove isn't just a *guy*. He's - something else. Something tricky and complicated and *not* just somebody who slinks into Steve's bed to literally *give him a hand*. It's. *Confusing*. And. It's *unfinished*. And, it's so goddamn hot in the car, Steve's sweater is sticking to him. He knocks down the heat and cranks open a window. January licks at his face and creeps down his neck, chilled and gloomy, and yet, it barely even touches him.

He's heated. Probably the adrenaline. Probably the effort of keeping up with Billy and the mild concern that his car will crash and burn if he hits the gas any harder. Steve should slow down and ask himself *why* he's doing this. Ask himself what he *wants* from this, and

what he expects to get, but, if there's one thing he's learned, it's not to ask impossible questions, or - not to ask questions he won't like the answers to.

Instead of asking questions, Steve switches his brain off - which, honestly, isn't very trying to do in this moment - and propels forward, keeping Billy in sight. He isn't paying attention to the curves of the road, isn't really wondering *where* they'll wind up at. The only important thing is catching up. Is not letting Billy get far enough ahead that Steve loses him. It's a case of *now or never*, he's decided somewhere along the way. If he doesn't track Billy down *right fucking now*, then he never will. Then he'll leave it, like Billy seems happy to do, and. Jesus, that's probably the most sensible option, but Steve has never been sensible.

Steve isn't paying attention to where they're going until it's too late.

They're suddenly on a spread of road that's familiar. Steve knows the bends like the back of his hand; knows the shape of the trees that sit either side of the road, some crooked and bowed, and others that shoot right up, up, up, like giant fingers pointing at the sky.

He *knows* this road, drives along it nearly every day.

Knows that, around the next bend, there'll be a light in the distance, bright and warm. Knows that, as they draw closer, the light will grow and then fracture; split into several.

Knows, very suddenly, that Billy is guiding him *home*.

What sort of game is this?

He doesn't get it, but, still, he follows Billy up the driveway. Follows *behind* like this is Billy's home. Like Billy's car belongs in front.

-

The house is lit up, just how he left it. Every single window glowing. *Throwing a party or something?*, Billy had asked last time. Steve frowns as he brakes to a slow stop behind the Camaro. He should have thought this through. *Bad idea, bad idea, bad idea*. But it's

too late, because Billy's *here*, at his house for the second time, and Steve's mind is blank, even as he climbs out of his car and locks up. Even as he approaches Billy's window, crouches, and raps his knuckles against the glass.

The window slips down. 'Harrington,' Billy says, voice even like Steve hasn't been trailing him.

'Why are you here?' Steve isn't tactful at the best of times.

'Because you were following me?'

Heat creeps up Steve's neck like a winding vine, and that's - well. It's fair enough, honestly. He's certainly in no position to play casual; to deny Billy's accusation. 'Yeah, well,' his tone is meek and he thinks, *careful*. Thinks, *don't show any weakness, because Billy will strike*. 'Need somewhere to stay again, or?'

It's easy to flip the situation around. Flip the spotlight, and shine the light on Billy's vulnerabilities. It's probably a dick-move, but Steve is still holding a grudge over the face-pummelling back in November, and no unsolicited handjob can change that.

Billy laughs, then scrubs a hand down his face. Sort of looks like he might be holding back. Biting down sour words or willing his fists to stay calm. Still, he fixes Steve with a smirk - the kind that might accompany lewd words like *want you to come for me, sweetheart*, but Steve can't be sure, because Billy had been *behind* him when he was running his mouth. Behind him, in the *dark*. Easier then, perhaps, for Steve to close his eyes and relax into the touch.

He still remembers it: the contrast of a rough palm with a gentle glide and the hot breath ghosting across his ear, his cheek. Down his neck. Has come from the thought of it once or twice since, but. It's *not* his fault. He certainly didn't dive under his bedsheets with the intention to jerk off over Billy Hargrove. The fragmented memories and sensations from that night had just sort of *drifted* back to him while his fist had been sliding up and down, *squeezing*, and then it had been too late. Steve had gotten there by remembering the way Billy had got him there.

It's definitely *not* why he'd followed Billy tonight, though.

Steve's looking for... *closure*.

Yeah, he thinks, *that's it*.

Closure.

He doesn't think he'll get it, however, because Billy's drawing the window up and Steve's ready to dodge the Camaro for the second time.

The engine doesn't rumble.

Billy throws his door open instead and hops out. Locks up, like he's *going somewhere*.

It's like some sort of stand-off or something; the pair of them staring at each other, silent. Steve doesn't want to be the first to look away, and it should be easy here, outside of *his* house, like this battlefield belongs to *him*, but nothing about it feels easy. He's still hot, even now that he's out of his car, sweat pooling at his temples.

Finally, Billy says, 'Well?'

'What?'

'Aren't you gonna invite me in?'

Steve scoffs and ignores the rush of blood beneath his skin. 'Why would I wanna do that?'

'You did last time,' Billy reminds him. Adds, 'Besides, I suppose you were following me for a reason.'

Right. Closure.

But opening the door to Billy Hargrove doesn't really seem like closure - doesn't seem like much of a good idea at all - and still, Steve does it. Walks right over to the goddamn house and fishes the key from his pocket, Billy in tow.

This time, there's no rain and their clothes are dry. Billy's boots don't bring in rainwater, so Steve doesn't bother to ask him to leave them by the door. This time, Billy doesn't look quite like a lost puppy. He still looks very much out of place, but Steve figures that's just a Billy thing. Figures that he doesn't look like he belongs anywhere in Hawkins. Figures he'd look better in Cali, soaking up the sun and doing whatever it is the people who live in California do.

Unlike the first time he'd been here, Billy isn't bleeding. It hadn't been a *good* thing, but it had been something to get Steve moving. Had been enough of a starting point. Now, though, Steve doesn't know where to begin. Knows that, if this was anybody else, he'd offer them a drink, tell them to sit down. Steve's good at being courteous and knows how to handle guests. But this is *Hargrove*, for God's sake.

Hargrove, who's already slinking away and wandering into the living room, utterly cocksure. Hargrove, who seems unfazed, now, to show his face, despite the events of the *last time* he was here. It's like it never happened.

Maybe it was just a dream, after all.

'So,' Billy's voice floats to him from the living room and Steve follows it, like being lured into a trap. 'Why'd you chase me?'

There's no simple answer; no *easy* response. He shrugs, though, like it's nothing. Like it means nothing when he says, 'Figured we should talk or something.'

'Oh?' Hargrove's back is turned and it's a good thing, really, because that means Steve can't see his face. It means that he might just be rehearsing for this moment, as opposed to actually living through it. It means that his eyes might be closed, mid-dream, and maybe he's just speaking to his bedroom ceiling or muffling words into his pillow.

'Yeah. You disappeared.'

'What do you mean?'

'You left. When I woke up, I mean. You were gone.'

Billy laughs and it's so sharp and so vivid that Steve *knows* he isn't dreaming. Knows that this is no rehearsal - it's the actual fucking show. 'What? You wanted me to make breakfast too?' He turns, and they're back in their stand-off position, eyes locked. 'You don't ask for much.'

'I don't ask for anything from you,' Steve states, surprised by the severity of his own tone. 'And I certainly didn't ask for what you gave me.'

'No?' Billy quips, not laughing now but smiling, or. Smirking.

'No.'

'You certainly didn't ask me to stop.'

This isn't how things had played out in Steve's mind. This wasn't part of the rehearsal. For a frustrating handful of seconds, Steve's lost for words. What's he supposed to say to that? The thing is - Billy's *right*. Steve didn't tell Billy to stop; didn't want him to stop. He can remember every fine fucking detail, pathetically enough. Can remember how it feels to share a bed with Billy; to spill into Billy's fist.

Steve says, 'Look,' as though he's trying to be the bigger person, as though he has any kind of authority here. 'I just wanted to... I don't know.'

'What, Harrington? Reminisce?'

'Fuck off.'

'Ask for round two?'

'No,' Steve snaps, and he's flipping the spotlight again. Pointing the beam at Billy and exposing his wounds. 'Ask about your dad.'

'What?' Billy's face finally drops.

It feels like winning, even if it's bittersweet.

'Your dad,' Steve repeats. 'Last time you were here, your lip was

busted.'

It's better now, for the most part. Steve's looking at Billy's mouth for the first time since the night of the storm, and it's red and looks a little dry. Has a small cut that's so close to healed, Steve hardly notices it.

'It was?' Billy drawls. The sarcasm on his tongue is as thick as honey.

Steve frowns. 'Yup. Busted and bleeding.' Just to remind him. Just to be an asshole. Because the Billy that had been here last time had not been this arrogant. Had, instead, been *quiet* and fucking *meek*. Right up until he hadn't been. Right up until he'd crept beneath Steve's covers.

Billy nods, head moving slowly like he might be processing his next words, but. All that comes out is, 'All better,' and he gestures to his mouth which is much better, but Steve would quite like to argue that it isn't *perfect*. Not anymore, and not for another several days yet.

'Sure,' he says instead, 'And, what? Is that the first time your dad's hit you?'

It's a mistake, judging by the stony silence that follows; cold and sharp and dangerous. Definitely a mistake, but the silence only fires up his curiosity. Because, initially, it had been nothing more than a dig. Nothing more than a verbal reminder of what Billy's dad had done, and how that had left Billy asking *Steve Harrington* for help. But, Billy's *silent*, eyes dark and wet, and Steve feels like he's hit a nerve. Feels like he's uncovered something that should've stayed buried; should've stayed unspoken.

The silence speaks for itself.

'It's not the first time,' Steve mutters, more to himself than to Billy. He knows he should keep his mouth sealed, but he isn't good at that. He knows, too, that there are parents out there who *do* punish their kids like that, and. *Jesus*. Billy doesn't *deserve* it, but he's no angel. Must get up to all kinds of shit that pisses his dad off, but. It's the silence that unnerves Steve. It's the silence that gets him thinking. Has him wondering, *how often?* and *how far?*

'It isn't the first time.' He repeats. 'Is it?'

'The fuck is it to you?' Billy asks, tone not quite as sharp as he's shooting for. His voice is low, though. Gravelly.

'Nothing,' Steve admits, because that's the truth, right? It's nothing to Steve. None of his business.

'You're right, Harrington. It's nothing to you. You gonna quit asking dumb questions?' There's more spice to Billy's tone, now. More impatience.

'You drove here, man.' Steve offers, knowing it's a weak argument, and knowing exactly what Billy will say next.

'Yeah, because *you* were fucking following me.' Billy's closer, and. When did that happen? How did that happen?

'Yeah, and you fucking know why,' Steve bites back.

It's not working. This 'closure' thing. Steve's doing it wrong, but Billy has such a way of getting under his skin. Like Steve's natural talent of detecting and hunting down danger, Billy has some way of unravelling Steve's composure. It's like he doesn't even have to *try*. They're too - opposite. Too - different. Billy knows which buttons to press, and Steve's certain he has Billy's buttons figured, too.

He doesn't know where it comes from - this sudden white-hot flare of heat that makes him say, 'If you didn't piss your dad off, we wouldn't even be here.'

Hargrove scoffs. 'Wrong. If you didn't stalk me by the side of the fucking road until I came home with you, we wouldn't be here.'

'I *helped* you. Gave you somewhere to stay for the night. Pretty sure you were appreciative at the time.' Steve's jaw is tense, teeth grinding together. 'Remember that, Billy? Didn't you come upstairs just to thank me?'

'Yeah,' Billy licks his bottom lip and Steve's gaze follows. 'Yeah, and that's why you followed me tonight, right? Looking for a chance to do me another favour, just so you could get another thank-you?'

There's something about those words that makes Steve stall. Renders him speechless for a second. Leaves him wondering if that's *why* he'd chased Billy down, after all. 'No,' he shakes his head. Thinks, *closure*.

'Whatever, man,' Billy shrugs. 'I'm out of here.'

'Wait,' Steve protests, and Billy's already walking. 'We didn't even talk about -'

Billy interjects. 'I don't owe you shit. What're you looking for? An explanation? An apology? What do you want?'

'I don't know. Some sort of conversation, or something.'

'You wanna discuss it? Go ahead.'

'Fuck off,' Steve snaps, regretting the car-chase. Regretting everything.

'No. *You* fuck off.' Billy's back is turned, feet moving.

'Yeah, well,' Steve calls out, 'Next time your dad throws punches, don't come to me for help.'

That does it.

Somehow, Billy's back in the room. In front of Steve. Taking up his space. A fist bunching up the material of his shirt.

Steve says, 'Get off,' but it's mild and quiet and drowned out by Billy's next words.

'I didn't come to you for help. *You* brought me here.'

'And *you* asked if you could stay.' *Bad idea, bad idea, bad idea.*

Steve's waiting for it: impact, and the crunch of bone. Waiting for Billy to finish the job he'd started some months ago. To just - pick up where he'd left off but, this time, there'd be no one to intervene. No one to stop him.

Nothing happens.

Billy's fist doesn't meet his face.

It's so unexpected, honestly, when Billy's hold on him loosens, that Steve can't help himself -

Because he doesn't want Billy to *leave*. Even if he is an asshole. Even if there's nothing to really talk about.

Steve didn't chase him down for nothing. Even if he doesn't know *why* he followed him, or. *What* he wants from him. He knows it hadn't been for nothing.

He can't help himself. Because Billy's grasp, fingers creasing Steve's shirt, grows slack, and Steve knows two things. One: Billy's going to leave. Two: He really *has* struck some nerve, but. Billy isn't *pissed*. Isn't *raging*. He's just. Surrendering. Looks all *hurt*, maybe. Like Steve's just broadcast some deep, dark secret to the whole of Hawkins, and not just to his empty living room. Like, maybe Billy had - Christ - *trusted* him, or something. Had reached out and asked for a favour.

Billy's in the spotlight - again - and he looks exposed. Unguarded.

Fragile.

So, Steve can't help himself.

He pounces.

There's no crunch of bone, but there *is* impact. Steve's mouth covering Billy's. More like a punch than a kiss, Steve's lashing out with his mouth. Violence without the blood-shed, except. Billy hisses, and Steve remembers the split in his mouth that night of the storm. Remembers the blood, glittering under artificial lights. The tiny cut, where his lip is still healing. He doesn't pull back, but he tells himself: *take it easy*. Much like Billy's fist in his shirt, Steve eases up a little, and then they're -

Kissing.

He feels Billy's mouth grow slack and pliant for several beats, like he's just letting Steve kiss him. One, two, three. Then Billy's pulling away. He lets go of Steve's shirt entirely, starts to back off, but Steve

doesn't let him. It's an automatic response when his arms wrap themselves around Billy's waist; putting up a barrier that stops Billy from getting very far. It's not *planned*, and it's thoroughly fucking stupid, but he does it anyway.

'Harrington,' Billy mumbles, still trying to push back, 'What're you -'

'It's okay,' Steve tells him, even though it's not. It's all irrational, and it's dangerous, and it's senseless, but it *feels* good, and that's all Steve can focus on. It feels good, even though this - the kissing - feels more risky than Hargrove in his bed, somehow. He knows that makes zero sense and yet, at the same time, it makes complete sense. Because, last time, Billy had been *behind* him. They'd been hidden in the dark. Billy had provided some bullshit excuse - a *thank you*, maybe, or an *apology* - as to why his hand was snaking down the front of Steve's boxers, but. There's *no* excuse for this.

And there's no hiding. Not under the harsh lights of the living room.

And this time - this time, it's *Steve* who's closing in. Steve who's being un-fucking-reasonable.

He lunges again, teeth unintentionally catching Billy's bottom lip, and there's another hiss, but - Billy's *strong*. If anybody knows Hargrove's strength, it's Steve. Knows what it's like to be at the mercy of it. If Billy doesn't want this, he can easily shove Steve away and put an end to it.

But he doesn't.

He stops struggling, stops trying to break the barrier at his back. Billy grows still. Grows still, and Steve grows calm. He lessens the pressure of his mouth, drops the urgency and slows right down.

Steve slows down, and Billy parts his lips.

Hargrove kisses back.

-

It's quiet when Steve leads Billy up the stairs. Reminds him of the last time, when Billy had been uncharacteristically silent. The creak of

their weight on the steps does the talking.

There's nothing to say. This isn't like being with a girl, or with Nancy fucking Wheeler. Steve doesn't know his way around this. Doesn't know the rules, if there are any at all. It's best then, Steve decides, that he says nothing at all. Billy's following him, and that's something. That's all Steve needs to know that Billy wants this. That it isn't just *him* who's trying something. Billy follows, keeps close, right until Steve's hands are on him again, guiding him down to the bed. It's just as surreal as the last time, or maybe more so. This time, it's Steve hands that do the wandering. It's Steve, who's nudging Billy's thighs apart with his knee and sinking between them, keeping his balance with flat palms pressed into the mattress either side of Billy's shoulders.

Hargrove's beneath him, staring right past him as though there's something captivating on the ceiling. Steve's careful - hesitant - when he brings one hand up from the bed and catches Billy's chin between his finger and thumb. It does the trick; grabs Billy's attention, and his gaze is suddenly all Steve's. Like their stand-off again, but. With a new kind of tension. Still sizzling, still dangerous, but *different*. Something far more exhilarating than the sparks before a fist-fight. A new sort of adrenaline rush.

Suddenly, Steve doesn't have it in him to look away, even as he closes in. He keeps his eyes open, even as his vision blurs and Billy is too close, too out of focus, and their mouths are connected again.

Here, in his bedroom, on the bed, Steve is taking his time. Steve is *tasting* Billy, and isn't preoccupied with keeping him in place - with keeping him from leaving. Billy isn't going anywhere. Billy's kissing him back. Billy's thighs are still parted. Billy's eyes are closed.

Billy tastes like fire.

Steve's hard, uncomfortable in his denim. The seam cuts, but it's *some* sort of friction, so he doesn't have the heart to complain. Instead, he rocks down against the pressure; rocks down against Billy. The kiss grows lax as Billy's mouth drops, parts around an unexpected sound. Something - *soft*. Something quiet and smooth and so far from the growl that Steve's been expecting.

And then Billy's saying, 'Harrington', and there's a hand on Steve's chest, palm firm and hot, burning through the fabric of his shirt.

And Steve whispers, 'Relax', much like Billy's trick the first time. Knows that it isn't going to *do* very much to ease Billy's nerves, or his trepidation, or whatever the fuck he might be feeling. He has it in his head that Billy Hargrove can't be nervous about anything, so. Trepidation, probably. It's a puzzle, either way, considering it had been Billy who'd steered the ship the first time round.

'You freaked the first time,' Billy says - taunting - as though he's been reading Steve's thoughts. 'Sure about this?'

'Do I seem unsure?' Flipping the spotlight, yet again. It's Steve, after all, who brought Billy up here. It's Steve who's between Hargrove's thighs, bearing down. 'If you're having second thoughts, just say so, man.'

Billy scoffs, and the hand against Steve's chest falls away. 'Screw you.'

'Hey,' Steve drawls, 'Just making sure.' It's all part of some game they're playing, tone teasing, but. He *means* it, too.

'Shut up,' Hargrove shifts beneath him, impatient, and there's a line now - a crease - right between his eyebrows. The softness seems gone.

Until Steve bows his neck and kisses the corner of his mouth, and then Billy's melting beneath him. Billy's docile and compliant and spreading his legs further apart. Steve isn't sure how he does it, but he *does*. His thighs open wider, grow more accommodating, somehow, and Steve's smirking, or grinning, or - or maybe he isn't doing either of those things. Maybe his face is expressionless. Whatever. It doesn't matter. What matters is that Billy's under him, and he's *waiting* for Steve to make the next move. Is waiting for whatever Steve decides to give.

Steve is feeling generous.

Or just horny.

Billy's wearing a fucking belt, because of course he is, and Steve's fingers slip between their bodies to work at the buckle. There's no protest from Hargrove, even though Steve's half-expecting it. There's no fucking *help* from him either, but that's to be expected.

Metal gives way, and he's slipping the leather band through denim loops until the belt is free, hanging from his hand. He tosses it to the floor, and sets his fingers to Billy's zipper next.

'I got it,' Billy mutters, batting Steve's hand away. 'Why don't you work on your own?'

Maybe there *are* rules, after all. Like, maybe Billy doesn't want to be undressed. Maybe he doesn't want the help. A guy thing, maybe, because girls love that shit.

'Fine,' Steve responds, not discouraged. He gets to work - and fast.

There's nothing smooth or easy about it. Billy's on his back and Steve's still trying to keep some form of balance while their hands work away in the tight space between their hips. He's still tucked between Hargrove's thighs, but his knees are pressing into the mattress now, hands too busy to hold his weight up. Steve isn't entirely sure where he's going with this. For the most part, he's doing what feels right, or. For the most part, he's thinking with his cock. Because he's stiff as hell, and all he can think about it is *getting it out*, and hoping that Hargrove's doing the same. As for whatever comes next, well. All bets are off.

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Button popped and zip tugged down, Steve's jeans are shoved halfway down his thighs. Underwear, too.

Billy's jeans had been doing the same, but. There'd been no room for him to keep his thighs parted with the denim waistband wrapped tight around them, restrictive, like they might be trying to tell him *bad idea, bad idea*, and making the whole ordeal more difficult. Billy's quick at thinking, though, where Steve is - slower. Mind turned to gloop because the blood from his brain has rushed right fucking *down* to his dick, and. It's just not easy, trying to *think*, trying

to *solve* the issue, when Billy Hargrove is under him, just as hard as Steve is. Billy's quick. He drags the denim down his legs until his jeans are a screwed-up mess at the end of Steve's bed.

Rules. There might be rules, so Steve keeps his jeans *on*, but. It's not much of a problem, because the material is loose enough where it's bunched just above his knees and, anyway, he's not the one with his legs spread. Doesn't need all the space he can get when he's tucking himself back between Billy's thighs, lining up their hips so there's the first jolting spark of contact when their cocks rub.

Steve has spent the last six days wondering why Billy had crept into his bedroom.

To say thank you, apparently. Perhaps Billy's so bad at thank-you's that climbing into Steve's bed just to get him off had actually been the preferable option. Because Steve doesn't even know if Billy had been *hard*, or turned on, or whatever. It's not like Steve had given any impression that he'd wanted that. Hell, he hadn't known he'd wanted it until Billy's hand was already around him.

Here, it feels like Steve has his answer. Or part of it, at least.

Billy is enjoying himself. Billy's flustered; face pink and without his usual shit-eating smirk. Billy's eyes are closed, eyelashes unreasonably long where they're splayed across his cheeks, and his mouth is slick and shiny from kissing, parted *just so*.

Hargrove's eyes are closed, and that means that Steve can look. Means that Steve can watch him, without being called out for it.

He'll call himself out for it.

But. *Later*.

Much like the last time, the self-chastising can wait. Much like the last time, Steve's switching his brain off and melting into the physical sensations like they're the only feelings that matter.

Billy Hargrove is picture-perfect beneath him, a loose curl falling over his forehead, damp with sweat. It feels like missing out, Steve

thinks - Billy with his shirt on. His pants are *off*, and his shirt should be, too, but Steve puts an abrupt end to those thoughts, starts to wonder why he's even thinking things like that, so he presses *down* where their hips meet, their dicks sliding together, and suddenly, Steve's empty-headed.

Instead of chasing his own thoughts, he's chasing that pressure; starts building a rhythm until he is, essentially, grinding against Billy. He isn't the only one doing the work. Billy's lifting his hips each time Steve bears down. They're working together to create and maintain a pace, following each other until neither are sure who's leading.

It feels good, but it's not enough because it isn't easy, keeping their cocks lined up and touching, so. Steve doesn't really have to think about it. He dips a hand between them, balancing over Billy with just one palm pressed into the mattress now.

He wraps his fist around Billy, first. Jerks him off a little because the way Billy's breath hitches is too good and Steve wants more.

How the tables have turned, he thinks to himself; the first coherent thought since that first slide of skin-on-skin. Billy's the one being touched this time. Billy's the one biting back any sounds that might be making their way up his throat. He thinks, *let me hear you*, but doesn't dare say it. He's trying to stick to the rules here, which is pretty fucking ironic, considering they're breaking every rule with every flick of Steve's wrist and every shudder of Billy's breath.

No, Steve doesn't dare tell Billy that he wants to hear him, but. He remembers, vividly, the spew of filth that Hargrove had muttered down his ear less than a week ago. Remembers every single word, clearly enough that he can repeat them back to him. That Steve can say, 'You like this, Billy. Don't you?'

He isn't sure if the mimicking registers with Billy or not. If it does, Hargrove doesn't give it away. Steve's expecting some harsh response, like. Maybe a gruff, *shut the fuck up, Harrington*, or maybe even a thump in the arm. He isn't expecting Billy to nod. It's only subtle, and Steve would have missed it if he hadn't been watching closely. Billy's eyes are still closed, and he seems - out of it, almost. Like Steve's words aren't registering at all. It's enough to tug a groan out of Steve,

and then he's opening his fist to accommodate his own cock, bringing them together, once again, in a much firmer hold. The girth of the two of them together stretches out his hand, feels heavy in his palm.

And, like the first time, everything is too *dry*. There's some slick from Billy, or from Steve, or from the two of them, but not enough to allow his hand to slide smoothly as he starts to stroke their dicks. There's some friction because of it, but it feels *good*. Really fucking good.

'Holy shit,' Steve pants. 'Holy shit. That okay?'

Steve's still hovering over Billy, holding himself up with one hand and relying on Billy to hold the rest of his weight. Chest-to-chest, thigh-to-thigh, they're tightly pressed together, Steve's working hand the only thing between them as he jerks himself and Billy simultaneously. And people have the nerve to tell him he isn't good at multi-tasking.

Billy's eyes finally open, sea-blue turned dark in Steve's dimly-lit bedroom. They look more deep-ocean than the glittering surface of the sea. Wet, too, just in the corners, and Steve's chest blooms with nervous energy. 'Good,' Hargrove mumbles, breathless. 'Yeah, fuck. It feels good.'

Steve nods, like he gets it. Like it's mutual. Like he's telling Billy, *you're right, I feel it too*.

There's something in his bedside drawer that might make the glide of his palm easier, but Steve thinks about the rules again. Decides it's probably too much. Decides it's best, probably, that they just do this without much messing around. Without any pause. Because if they pause, even briefly, one or both might wake up and start making sense again. Might put an end to it.

The slight rough-edge of friction is just something that they'll have to deal with, but. Steve's *leaking* already, so. It helps, just a little, when he swirls his thumb against the sensitive tip of his cock, collects what's there, and drags his palm down again. Tries not to think about the fact that Billy's cock is sticky, not just with his own mess, but with Steve's now, too.

It's slow and clumsy to begin with, but Steve gradually becomes familiar with the new size and weight cradled in his hand. He grows more confident with every snap of his wrist, eventually speeding things up, which is a good thing, apparently, because Billy nods his head again, nearly frantic. Says, 'Yeah, like that,' and the choked out words are enough of an encouragement to keep Steve at this pace, even though his wrist is starting to ache. It's not a priority - nothing he can't deal with.

His priority is getting Hargrove there.

It's a fucking surreal turn of events. Steve can still feel the grasp of Billy's hand in his shirt; can still feel the heat of their mixed tempers, except. That's all left downstairs, in the living room, and the only heat between them now is the fire fuelled by the mutual electric spark each time Steve applies pressure to the grip he has around them both.

He knows he isn't going to last long, but there's some urgency to tip Billy over the edge first.

He's not a selfish lover. Likes to think the girls he's been with have always been left satisfied. But. This isn't *that*. Steve doesn't want to make Billy come first out of fucking *politeness*, or. To brag about it later. It's something else. Something less easy to box up and label.

It's more to do with the way that Hargrove has gone soft beneath him; all of the fight drained from his body. It's something to do with the defencelessness of Billy Hargrove on his back, knees parted and face flushed.

It's more to do with feeling like he's cracked Hargrove open and unearthed all the tender parts.

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It's not easy. Steve's lip stings where his teeth are digging and his eyes are screwed shut in concentration. Concentration and, for some reason, he thinks that *seeing* Billy might make it more difficult to hold back. Not that he'd ever admit it, but. He's terrified to open his eyes, feeling that he might just slip over the edge if he catches sight of

Billy's parted mouth or the line of sweat that's dripping from his temple. Too many sensations, probably. Too many things to overwhelm him. Better off with his eyes closed, trying hard to work his hand against Billy more than himself. It's like he's cheating, but there are no rules dictating who gets to come first, so it's not a bad thing, then, that he's focusing on Billy instead. Not a bad thing that he wants Billy to unravel beneath him while he still has some sense to properly observe it.

Judging by the trembling of Billy's thighs, it's working.

Steve feels like he's nearing some sort of finish-line, wrist positively numb and exhausted but determined. Never stopping. Never slowing down once he sets a pace that Hargrove seems to appreciate. A pace that has Billy bucking his hips up and up and up, just to meet Steve's touch, like he's fucking his hand.

He only realises that he's smiling when Hargrove stutters out, 'The fuck are you smirking at?'

Steve shakes his head. 'Nothing.' Opens his eyes while he says it and nearly wishes he hadn't. Because Billy's - pretty. Like, it's stupid and he *knows* it, but it doesn't change the fact. It's obvious. Would only be more dumb to try to deny it. He's attractive, sure, and one of those *pretty* sort of guys, whose eyelashes are too long, whose lips are too full. Whatever. Steve closes his eyes again, and Billy huffs but there's no real tension. Billy's too busy using Steve's hand to get pissed at him.

And then Billy's hands fly up, suddenly, and he's gripping Steve's upper arms. It shocks Steve's eyes open again. He asks, 'You good?'

'I'm close,' Billy tells him. 'Don't stop.'

That stokes the fire in Steve's belly. Makes him work harder as he jerks Billy, keeping their cocks packed together in the palm of his hand. 'I'm not gonna stop, Billy,' he mumbles, because Hargrove's blunt nails are digging into the tender muscles of his arms, like he's convinced there's a possibility that Steve *will* stop. 'I won't stop,' Steve repeats, slowly this time, where his hand works fast. 'Gonna keep going until you come. Is that what you want?'

If feels hot and dirty and reckless to be speaking like this, but Steve can't quite help himself.

If there *are* any rules, he's most certainly bending them, but. Billy had gotten away with it the first time; had gotten away with spewing dirty words into Steve's ear. Besides, Billy's too far gone to fight. He mutters, 'Yeah. *Yeah.*'

Steve must be too far gone as well, because he doesn't think when he whispers, 'I've got you. Gonna make you feel so good, Billy.' It's not a good idea, but Steve's staring, anyway. He watches the bob of Billy's throat; notes the daze in his lidded eyes, the dampness of his curls. Makes Steve think about the night of the storm, when Billy had been soaked through. Had looked lost. Had asked to stay. 'Wanna watch you come for me.'

Too much. Too blunt. Too revealing.

But Billy just groans and there's a sudden tensing beneath Steve; a sudden sharp shock where Billy's fingertips pinch his arms. Steve doesn't let up. He keeps going, even when Billy lets out a telling sound and he comes, hips shuddering, into Steve's fist and onto Steve's dick. His bed is going to be a fucking mess by the time they're both done, but that'll be a chore for *tomorrow*. Something to think about *tomorrow*, when Billy is long gone. For now, Steve keeps his eyes fixed on Hargrove. Catches the fluttering of his eyelashes when he comes undone. Watches as something close to a smile ghosts across his parted lips. Feels Billy's hands still gripping his arms, holding Steve as he finishes between them.

'Shit,' Steve gasps, 'Fuck, baby.' He wastes no time in chasing the pleasure tucked at the base of his own spine; doesn't let Billy catch his fucking breath. Steve releases the hold he has on the two of them, Billy's cock a spent mess, his own aching. He shows some mercy, at least, in letting go of Billy, but Steve proceeds to grind their hips together, rubbing his cock against anything that just happens to *be* there. Ends up thrusting against Billy's sensitive dick, against the sharp edge of his hip, and even against his stomach. It doesn't *matter*, and Steve can hardly keep in one place, all unsteady and urgent. It doesn't matter where the friction is coming from, so long as there is some. So long as he can pursue the tingling that starts up in his legs

and his belly, trail the feeling like he'd trailed Billy's car, and just - finally *come*.

Steve orgasms with a grunt.

It's over quickly, and he's only a little sour about that. One second he's grinding against Billy, knees weak where they press into the mattress, and the next second, Steve's coming, adding to the sticky mess that's already settling between their bodies, Billy holding him the entire time.

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This isn't part of the plan, but there had never really *been* a plan.

Billy's still in his bed and it's dark beyond Steve's bedroom windows.

It's quiet, the same way it had been when they'd climbed the stairs to get here. They're back-to-back, a safe distance between them that ensures they're not touching. Because, well. Rules?

Billy could go home. He has his car with him this time, and although Steve still feels uneasy about unlocking the door and sending Billy out, he knows, somewhere deep inside, that he'd be just fine. Would make it to his car, and would make it back home, in one piece. But Steve doesn't mention it. Doesn't say, *maybe you should get going*, because Billy hasn't moved since Steve's flopped down on the bed next to him. Hasn't said a single thing. Maybe it's the mess that's keeping Billy where he is. Maybe he's waiting for Steve to lead him to the bathroom so that he can clean up. Maybe he's *sleeping* because it's late now, and it's dark outside, and Billy's so *quiet*.

'Hey, Hargrove?' Steve's voice is low, just in case Billy's sleeping. Just in case Billy doesn't want to answer.

There's a pause and Steve's drowning in a deafening silence, and then Billy says, 'Yeah?'

That rapid *thrum-thrum-thrum* in Steve's throat is back. He half-wishes that Billy hadn't answered. He can't help it. Needs to say it, despite the rules. 'You ever find yourself walking around at night in the middle of a storm again,' he trails off, fingernails drawing restless

shapes on the duvet. Trails off, like Billy might understand if he doesn't finish his sentence, but then he swallows his doubt, heart thudding as though he hasn't dealt with scarier things - monster-shaped things - and adds, 'Plenty of room here for two.'